

“**T**he campaigns of the people are only weak when the heart of woman is not recruited; but when women help, when the timid and quiet woman cheers and applauds, when the learned and virtuous woman anoints the work with the honey of her affection, the work is invincible.” José Martí

We have always devoted two pages of all our issues of *ISLAS* to blacks and *mestizos* who are serving sentences in Cuban penitentiaries. Most of them have been incarcerated because they object to or criticize the government's policies, or because they have publicized human rights violations. In some cases, it is even because they attempted to distribute the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Cuba is a signatory. What we



are dealing with here is men who are deprived of their liberty not because they have committed or advocated acts of violence, but because of their convictions and beliefs. They are our *Prisoners of Conscience*.

As such, the Ladies in White are irrevocably linked to them. These women are courageous and dignified when they peacefully and rightfully exercise their constitutional right to demand freedom

for their husbands, sons, fathers, and brothers. Their international impact is ever increasing, as is exemplified by the European Parliament's decision to award them the Sakharov Prize.

The Ladies in White's national movement began in April 2003, as a result of the Cuban *Primavera Negra* [Black Spring], when nearly 80 peaceful dissidents and independent journalists were incarcerated. The Ladies in White movement brings together women from all walks of life, and with diverse faiths, ideologies, social backgrounds, and skin colors. They are united in their pain and determination to achieve the release of the loved ones. Despite the fact our journal features a section titled "Prisoners of Color," which focuses on imprisoned black men in Cuba, we would like to praise this broad and diverse group of women because it is representative of all of Cuba's races.

Racism is precisely one of the weapons used to attack and attempt to divide them. There are those who due to small-minded political interests, try, unsuccessfully, to interrupt the constant and growing attention the Ladies in White are garnering worldwide, taking particular advantage of moments when these women who march silently, but in a decidedly challenging manner, the streets of Cuban towns and cities.

The insults and virulence of which they are victims attempts to wound and humiliate them, but fall very short of intimidating them or causing them to desist. One of these women, Berta Soler, bears the visible mark of her African ancestry and works to reinforce the group's solidarity. As another of the group's leaders, Laura Pollán, remarked, "What importance can skin color or eye color have? What is truly important is how big one's heart is..."

At this time, we would like to give them, as well as Doctor Marcelo Cano Rodríguez, our full acknowledgement. The latter is serving out an eighteen-year prison term for “his humanitarian and contestatory work towards demonstrating to international public opinion the reality faced by political prisoners and Cuba’s entire prison population, due to the penal system’s meager or non-existent dental and medical care.”

This edition of *ISLAS* once again offers its readers the most recent analyses and critiques of racism on the island. The majority of them have been carried out or set forth by blacks Cubans. Among them, one of our newest collaborators, Lourdes Chacón Núñez, focuses on the value of emotional intelligence in developing skills, attitudes, and behaviors that can help black Cubans face difficulties, challenges, and obstacles at times when unfettered or hidden expressions of racism try to marginalize and even discredit them.

José Hugo Fernández offers us an interesting piece about one of many Cuban popular creations, “The Sack Man,” a ‘fictional’ character via whom full-blown racism is used ‘creatively’ to craft an evil rouse fed by and intended to foment fear of blacks. This stigma has been an obstacle on Cuba’s road to modernity. This “Sack Man,” an image of a frightful, raggedly dressed black man, is still roaming the streets and fields of Cuba, just as in earlier times. The intention of this image continues to be controlling Cuban children by dissuading them from disobeying—a sort of Cuban bogeyman.

Our brief article by Leonardo Calvo is particularly important because its topic is “Raza,” a documentary by young filmmaker Eric Corvalán. According to Calvo, “The ideas and values expressed in [this] documentary reconfirm there is an growing need in Cuban society to open up a broader, more transparent, objective and extensive debate [about racism] that can assist us in finding the causes, and historical and structural underpinnings of the social rupture and inequality we suffer.” He adds: “Since the film’s debut, many interested parties and professionals are advocating for a longer run for “Raza.” They would like for the whole population to have access to it and be exposed to its ideas and value judgments, so all Cuban can contribute to this very necessary yet delayed discussion.”

There are now voices in Cuba that speak out loudly and clearly against racism. They belong to folks who are increasingly seeking access to public spaces that for years had been denied them. Despite the fact this campaign is in its early stages, one cannot help but be impressed by the fact that the struggle and fight to get at the root of this problem now has new combatants.

The most recent events in Cuba leave one with the impression that there are now two very different groups of people that define themselves, at least publicly, as defenders of equality: those who continue to work within old officially sanctioned parameters, with certain permission and space offered by the government, and those who have broken with them, to find a road less encumbered or influenced by political and ideological interests. This latter path is more transparent and closer to the truth.

Despite open or tacit prohibitions, there are now an increasing number of voices challenging official rhetoric and practices. Notwithstanding, one must acknowledge that the strength and power of their opponents, and the absolute control these opponents have over the mass media, represents new challenges. *ISLAS* will continue taking them on and facing them, too.

Dr. Juan Antonio Alvarado Ramos